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PUBLIC CONSULTATION

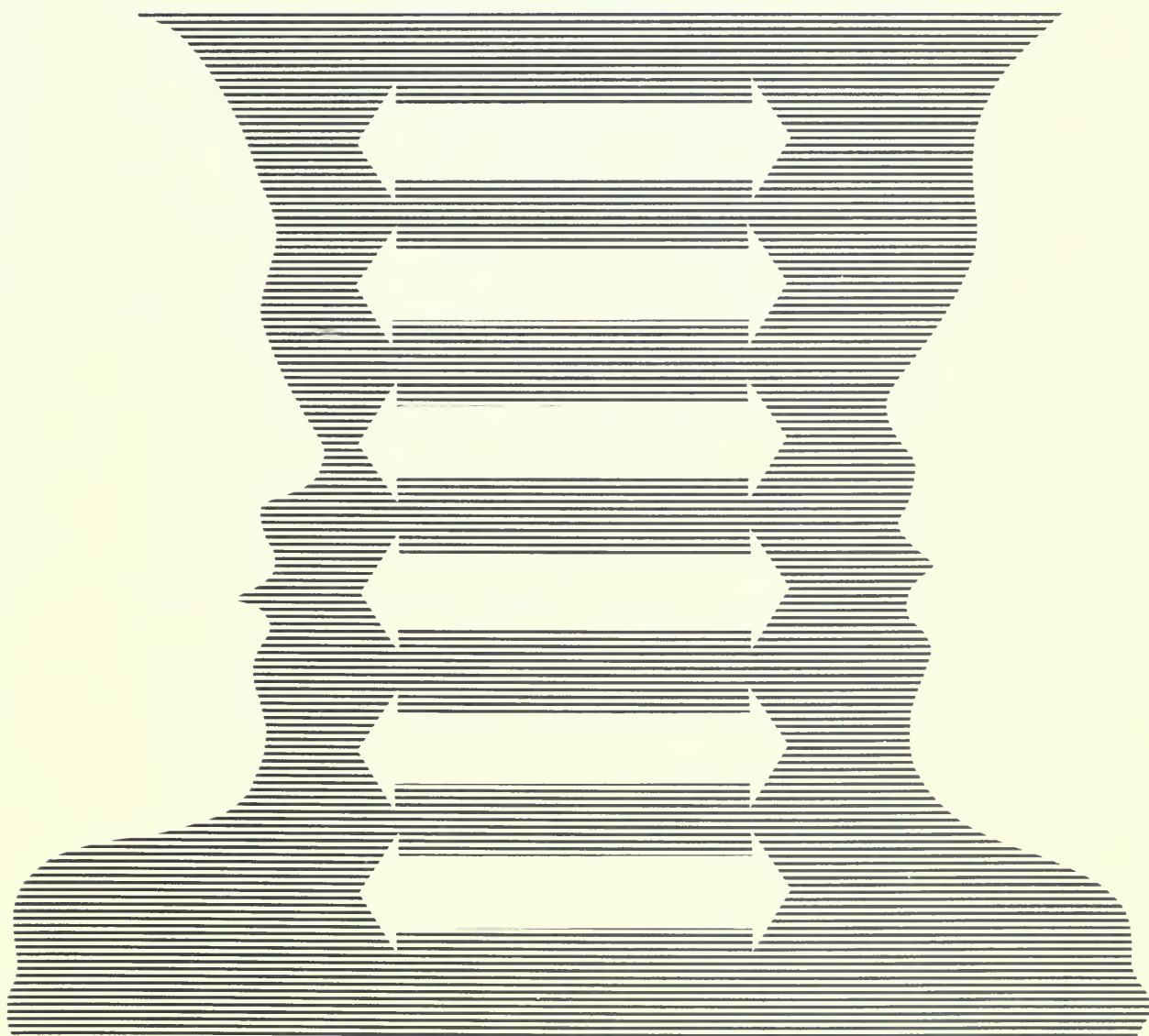
THE GUIDE



Environment
Ontario

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

THE GUIDE

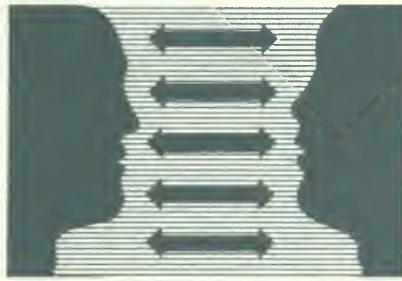


Environment
Ontario



Contents

<i>INTRODUCTION</i>	<i>_____</i>	<i>(i)</i>
<i>I WHAT IS PUBLIC CONSULTATION?</i>	<i>_____</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>II OUR COMMITMENT TO PUBLIC CONSULTATION</i>	<i>___</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>III PUBLIC CONSULTATION ACTIVITIES</i>	<i>_____</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>IV DEVELOPING YOUR PROGRAM</i>	<i>_____</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>V BUILDING COMMUNICATION SKILLS</i>	<i>_____</i>	<i>39</i>
<i>VI MAKING IT WORK: 10 PRINCIPLES</i>	<i>_____</i>	<i>45</i>
<i>VII WHERE TO FIND HELP</i>	<i>_____</i>	<i>46</i>
<i>VIII THE CHECKLIST</i>	<i>_____</i>	<i>49</i>
<i>IX A FINAL WORD</i>	<i>_____</i>	<i>52</i>



INTRODUCTION

Environment Ontario's commitment to public consultation recognizes the right of people to have a meaningful role in environmental protection and management. It is the Ministry's policy to develop and utilize a wide range of consultation activities to meet the needs of individuals, groups and communities.

*This **Guide** is part of a resource kit designed to equip staff with ideas and skills for planning and carrying out effective public consultation programs. The **Guide** is a practical, self-teaching resource for Ministry staff that covers all stages of a public consultation program.*

***Parts I and II** state what the Ministry means by public consultation, emphasizing how consultation can lead to better decisions.*

*In **Part III**, the characteristics and effective uses of 11 major consultation activities are summarized. These activities are the building blocks of your consultation program.*

***Part IV** offers guidelines for developing an overall program that meets your needs. The experience of two effective consultation programs within the Ministry are provided as case studies.*

*Communication skills are an important element in good consultation. **Part V** provides a series of tips for improving your communication skills in four key areas.*

***Part VI** offers 10 guiding principles of effective public consultation.*

*If consultation sounds like hard work, remember that help is available. The Communications Branch can help you in developing your program and can provide support services in carrying out the communication components of your consultation. Details are provided in **Part VII**.*

***Part VIII** is a "checklist" of logistical concerns that are likely to come up in nearly every consultation activity. A pad of checklists is provided in the public consultation resource kit for your use.*

*Finally, **Part IX** will help you determine if you had an effective and good consultation program.*

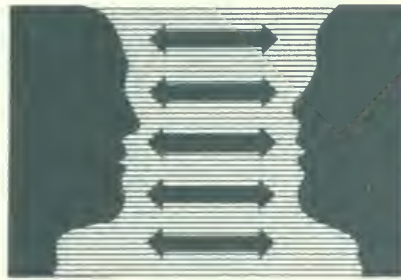
INTRODUCTION

Included in the resource kit is a series of **public consultation handbooks**, which complement the **Guide**. The **handbooks** provide more detailed information on the design and implementation of specific consultation activities. The first four **handbooks** in the series are:

- 26 • **RUNNING A SUCCESSFUL PUBLIC MEETING**
- 27 • **HOLDING A SUCCESSFUL OPEN HOUSE**
- 28 • **MANAGING A SUCCESSFUL WORKSHOP**
- 29 • **ESTABLISHING A SUCCESSFUL PUBLIC COMMITTEE**

More **handbooks** will be added to the series. Through your “public consultation training contact person”, let the Communications Branch know what is helpful in the **Guide** and **handbooks**, and what ideas could be included in future materials and editions of the kit.

In addition to the **Guide** and **handbooks** provided in the kit, the Communications Branch also has a public involvement publication, **ACHIEVING GOOD COMMUNITY RELATIONS**, that will be of help in developing a consultation program.



1 WHAT IS PUBLIC CONSULTATION?

Public consultation is an on-going process involving communication and interaction between government and the public. Through it, all parties become better informed about the range of views on issues and proposals. Most importantly, the process provides opportunities to influence government decisions. A good public consultation program will result in better decisions that are more sensitive and responsive to public concerns and values.

Public consultation is carried out through specific activities which by themselves may or may not influence decisions. The activities involve face-to-face contact, verbal communication, or written correspondence between Ministry staff and the public.

What can consultation do?

A public consultation program will include **four major elements**:

- **Information Out:** making information available on emerging plans, or policy initiatives
- **Information In:** obtaining information, opinion and recommendations
- **Dialogue and Consensus-building:** addressing areas of concern, clarifying views and constraints, assessing options and ways to implement them, and seeking to reach a consensus for action
- **Follow-up:** informing all participants and interested parties of any conclusions, decisions, commitments and next steps

Specific activities within a public consultation program will emphasize one or more of these four elements.

What activities are used?

Environment Ontario regularly uses the following activities to support its public consultation goals:

- **Public Meetings**
- **Open Houses**
- **Workshops**
- **Public Advisory Committees and Public Liaison Committees**
- **Public Discussion Papers and Calls for Submissions**
- **Toll-Free Telephone Lines**

WHAT IS PUBLIC CONSULTATION?

Other activities that are used occasionally and are worth exploring for more widespread application include:

- **Targeted Briefings**
- **Public Seminars**
- **Site Visits**
- **Monitoring Committees**
- **Focus Group Sessions**

Part III of the **Guide** provides a detailed description of these 11 activities, including their major characteristics and uses. Part IV offers guidelines on putting different activities together to develop an overall consultation program.

What about other Ministry activities?

Public consultation activities complement and are supported by a range of public information techniques and informal personal communication.

Public information techniques include Ministry correspondence, news releases, newsletters, posters, advertising, information services and the development of mailing lists. Informal personal communication includes such activities as routine telephone contacts, personal letters, and informal “coffee shop” discussions.

These activities can support your public consultation program by helping you:

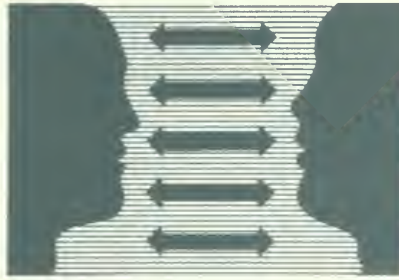
- develop the scope and objectives of your consultation program
- establish good community relations and gather information and perspectives prior to a consultation activity
- bridge individual activities within your overall consultation program
- provide follow-up information arising from a public consultation activity

Public consultation also complements the technical research and policy analysis you carry out in your role as a scientist, engineer or analyst for the Ministry.

Who is involved?

Participants in our public consultation programs include:

- concerned individuals
- community organizations
- environmental groups
- Native peoples
- public interest groups
- special interest groups
- Environment Ontario senior management and regional staff
- other Ontario Ministries
- municipal representatives
- other governments



II OUR COMMITMENT TO PUBLIC CONSULTATION

The Government of Ontario believes the public should be involved in the planning of policies, programs and projects. Environment Ontario's commitment to public consultation recognizes and ensures the right of members of the public to have a meaningful role in environmental protection and management. It is the Ministry's policy to develop and utilize a wide range of consultation activities to meet the needs of individuals, groups and communities.

As well, the public is demanding more direct involvement in government activities. Representatives of environmental interest groups, industry, labour and individual communities have shown their commitment by actively participating in our public consultation programs. They have invested considerable time and resources in becoming more knowledgeable about environmental issues, and have worked hard to make their concerns, expectations and priorities known to government.

What are the benefits of consultation?

Public consultation enriches and enhances the decision-making process by:

- establishing forums for government and the public to exchange ideas and information, clarify positions and expectations, and work together to develop constructive solutions and strategies on important environmental issues
- equipping government with more accurate and timely knowledge and insight on conditions, concerns, values and priorities
- providing the public with a better understanding of government programs and responsibilities, constraints and options

OUR COMMITMENT TO PUBLIC CONSULTATION

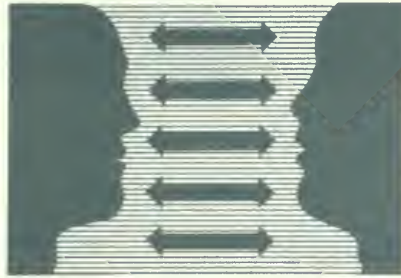
As a result, public consultation leads to better decisions and benefits everyone by:

- promoting policies and programs that are more sensitive and responsive to public concerns and priorities
- mobilizing the full range of industry, community and government resources and expertise in support of building consensus on environmental objectives
- fostering a more favourable climate for decisions, thus reducing the potential for conflict

How is Environment Ontario using consultation?

Environment Ontario's commitment to public consultation is being demonstrated through a range of public consultation programs throughout the Ministry's areas of responsibility. A few recent and on-going examples:

- **Advertising and discussion papers** are frequently used to introduce proposals for major new policies and programs.
- **The Remedial Action Plan (RAP)** program is using a combination of local public advisory committees, open houses, public documents, newsletters and toll-free numbers.
- **The Municipal/Industrial Strategy for Abatement (MISA)** is using a combination of a provincial advisory committee and public discussion papers released for comment and review.
- **The Clean Air Program (CAP)** and the **Environmental Assessment Program Improvement Project (EAPIP)** are both using combinations of discussion documents, public meetings and open houses.
- **Public meetings** are frequently used to help determine conditions for Ministry control orders.
- The **clean-up project** underway at the Deloro arsenic treatment plant includes an annual open house.
- A **public liaison committee** was established for the PCB cleanup project in Smithville.



III PUBLIC CONSULTATION ACTIVITIES

Public consultation activities are the building blocks of a consultation program. There is no single “best” consultation activity. Each has its own strengths and weaknesses, and each will have a unique role to play, depending upon the needs of both the Ministry and the public.

This chapter describes 11 public consultation activities. The principal features and suggested applications of each are summarized, as well as any special considerations or limitations. The first six activities are currently used by the Ministry; you may also want to consider the other five. Part IV will help you build an effective program using these activities.

1. *Public Meeting*
2. *Open House*
3. *Workshop*
4. *Public Advisory Committee and Public Liaison Committee*
5. *Public Discussion Paper and Call for Submissions*
6. *Toll-Free Telephone Line*
7. *Targeted Briefing*
8. *Public Seminar*
9. *Site Visit*
10. *Monitoring Committee*
11. *Focus Group Session*

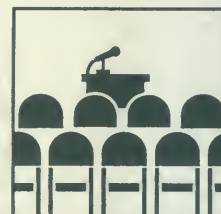
This chapter concludes with a review of informal communication techniques, which can support and establish connections between these formal consultation activities.

1.

Public Meeting

What:

A public meeting is a forum that provides you with an opportunity to make a formal presentation to the public and which, in turn, provides the public with an opportunity to respond directly and immediately with questions and comments. Anyone may attend. Convened and chaired by a Ministry representative or neutral party, it follows a set agenda.



When:

A public meeting is one of the most frequently used public consultation activities. It is typically used in combination with other activities (such as an open house or public discussion paper), and in some cases is required (for example, Control Orders under the *Environmental Protection Act*.)

A public meeting can be a particularly efficient method for conveying information directly and personally to a relatively large number of interested people. The face-to-face presentation format allows people to obtain immediate clarification of any particular facts or ideas presented. They can also develop an appreciation of both the common and conflicting concerns of others. Similarly, you can develop a better understanding of the concerns and perspectives of people through the questions, comments and discussion.

Special Considerations:

As with all consultation activities, a public meeting has its limitations. It is not always an effective forum for conveying extremely detailed information; nor can it provide you with an in-depth and representative understanding of the concerns and views of a particular group. As well, a public meeting is not a good forum for building consensus among groups or for arriving at a decision. Questions from the floor and follow-up discussion may be dominated by particular individuals and groups, limiting time for other people and perhaps shifting the discussion from the major purpose of the meeting.

Finally, the meeting may allow for confrontation, either between a particular group and Ministry staff, or between groups within a community. Confrontation is not necessarily a bad thing, but you must be prepared to deal with it.

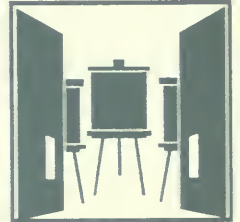
For more details, see the handbook, *RUNNING A SUCCESSFUL PUBLIC MEETING*.

2.

Open House

What:

An open house is a relatively informal event designed to allow people to drop in and obtain information at their convenience. Typically, it consists of a display presentation, complemented by handout materials and the presence of Ministry staff who meet with and answer people's questions one-on-one. It is held in a convenient location within the community, and, in accordance with the preferences of the audience(s), usually lasts for several hours during the day and/or evening.



Ministry staff serve as “hosts” to welcome participants and provide brief, informal orientations to the presentation and handout materials. You will want to establish a low-key presence, responding to questions or comments only at the instigation of the participants. A comment sheet is usually provided for people to register their written comments on the issue.

When:

A common and flexible consultation activity, an open house is frequently used as either a lead-in for another activity (such as a public meeting) or as a follow-up to previous activities (such as a public meeting or release of a discussion paper).

With no formal presentations and no rigid agenda, an open house is a good method of providing detailed information in a setting that is sensitive to people's schedules. It allows participants to peruse presentation materials at their leisure, and to ask highly specific questions that they might not be able to ask at a public meeting. Similarly, it allows you to respond to questions in considerable detail or to make specific arrangements for follow-up.

By emphasizing one-on-one contact, an open house establishes a relatively personal and non-confrontational atmosphere for addressing issues and exchanging views. Although the emphasis of an open house is upon providing information to the people, you also can gain considerable insight into the concerns and preferences of people through these informal, direct discussions.

Special Considerations:

One of the drawbacks of an open house is that the attendance may not be as high as with a public meeting. You may discover that you did not inform as many people as you had hoped. You may come away with a very good understanding of the concerns of a few people, but without a detailed, representative understanding of the larger audience or community.

As well, the low-key, personalized nature of an open house may even discourage some people from asking questions, if they feel they cannot ask “anonymously” as in a larger public meeting. Finally, an open house rarely allows for a good discussion among people with differing views, so it is not an appropriate forum for building consensus for action or arriving at decisions.

For more details, see the handbook, **HOLDING A SUCCESSFUL OPEN HOUSE**.

3. ***Workshop***

What:

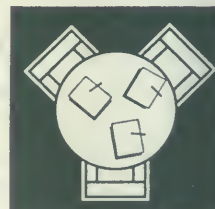
A workshop is a structured forum where individuals work together in groups on a common problem or task. Usually limited to a small number of invited participants, a workshop is best run by a “facilitator” whose function is to animate the participants, structure their input and ideas toward the common workshop task, and articulate the results of the discussion.

As the goal of the workshop is problem-solving rather than just identifying specific public concerns, participants are typically selected for their knowledge and expertise. A cross-section of interests, backgrounds and perspectives is highly desirable. As the “host” you will be responsible for articulating the “problem” or “challenge” for the workshop participants. The facilitator will check with you frequently to ensure that the workshop participants are providing you with what is needed.

When:

A workshop is a specialized consultation activity used to support or build upon other activities, such as public meetings and open houses. It is a useful device for developing a better understanding of issues and problems, assessing potential solutions and building consensus.

A workshop frequently allows for creative, free-flowing exploration of new avenues and innovative approaches. While it is not necessarily a forum for making decisions, a workshop can provide insights for consensus that you can apply in future activities.



PUBLIC CONSULTATION ACTIVITIES

Special Considerations:

Selection of participants is the most important concern in holding a successful workshop. While you will want a range of perspectives represented, you must ensure that all participants come to the session committed to the group's common challenge. Otherwise, the workshop may become a forum for confrontation among those with differing views, or it may be dominated by one or two individuals more interested in airing their own ideas than in trying to arrive at a consensus.

You must give careful thought to setting out clear and realistic objectives. If the purpose of the workshop is not clear, then the group may spend much of its time trying to define the challenge. If the objectives are not realistic, then you risk leaving participants with a sense of having wasted their time.

Choosing a good facilitator is another critical element in planning your workshop. Your facilitator must show leadership as well as sensitivity and patience. Facilitation involves regularly identifying issues, concerns and needs, and communicating these findings to both the participants and you as workshop host. A good facilitator will be instrumental in helping all participants articulate and clarify positions and concerns. While facilitators must ensure they are knowledgeable about the workshop's problem or task, you will have a responsibility to brief them and keep them informed about recent developments.

*For more details, see the handbook, **MANAGING A SUCCESSFUL WORKSHOP**.*

4.

Public Advisory Committee and Public Liaison Committee

What:

A public advisory committee or public liaison committee is a group of representatives from a particular community or set of interests appointed to provide comments and advice on an environmental issue. Typically, a public liaison committee is organized at the local level to address a specific problem, and may have a relatively short lifespan. A public advisory committee, on the other hand, is usually asked to deal with planning and policy development issues related to a relatively complex and lengthy environmental challenge.



PUBLIC CONSULTATION ACTIVITIES

In either committee format, relevant community groups and agencies are invited to nominate members (whose selection does not have to be approved by the Ministry, unless it is a committee appointed by the Minister). Members are appointed to represent a broad spectrum of community interests. They meet regularly with Ministry staff to provide on-going input and advice throughout the duration of the issue.

When:

Both public advisory and public liaison committees are useful vehicles for organizing and coordinating the involvement and input of a wide range of people. They are especially useful for developing a consensus for action on complex issues that touch upon many different facets of the community. In some cases, they can also be an effective way for you to disseminate detailed information and decisions throughout a community. These committees allow for regular and frequent contact between the community and the Ministry, providing opportunities for sharing information, exploring alternative strategies, negotiating solutions, and building consensus.

Environment Ontario has used public advisory committees in several major public consultation programs, including Remedial Action Plans, MISA and EAPIP. Public liaison committees have been established to deal with many local problems, such as those in the Junction Triangle and South Riverdale.

Special Considerations:

Selection of participants is a major concern in the organization of a public advisory or public liaison committee. The range of interests on your committee must be broad enough to represent the entire community, yet committee members must be willing to avoid confrontation and work together on the common challenge. Be aware of this potential for conflict within the committee.

Be clear and realistic in outlining your needs and expectations. Committee members may begin the process with unrealistically high expectations of what they will accomplish.

Bear in mind that once you have established an advisory or liaison committee, you must remain actively involved in its activities, otherwise, it will take on a "life of its own". Members may lose sight of the reason for the committee's existence and fail to deal with the issues you need resolved. Consider, too, that their comments to the media may not coincide with Ministry policy and statements.

For more details, see the handook, ESTABLISHING A SUCCESSFUL PUBLIC COMMITTEE.

5.

Public Discussion Paper and Call for Submissions

What:

A public discussion paper issued with a call for submissions is a specialized consultation activity providing for the exchange of information and views with a large number of people. Typically, the Ministry will issue a discussion paper on a proposed major policy or program, and, through advertising and direct mailings, invite interested people and organizations to submit opinions and responses. You will need to talk to your Project Co-ordinator in the Communications Branch about any advertising requirements.



When:

A public discussion paper and call for submissions is an excellent means of providing a large number of people and organizations throughout the province with information on major proposals. A review of written submissions will help you get a sense of the range of concerns of interested parties. Written submissions are usually well thought out, and prepared by people with considerable interest in the issue. They may reveal people with considerable knowledge and expertise who may be helpful participants in future consultation activities, such as workshops or public advisory committees.

While the discussion paper and written submissions on their own may not provide a direct opportunity to discuss an issue or identify possible solutions, they will help you to anticipate what other kinds of follow-up consultation activities would be most appropriate.

Special Considerations:

A discussion paper issued with a request for public comments is not a particularly effective approach for site-specific or localized problems. You cannot be certain that all those people and organizations affected by the issue have received the discussion paper. Even then, many people who may be interested will be unable to or feel uncomfortable with replying in writing. You will probably need to followup with more focused and personal consultation activities.

A discussion paper can also be cumbersome and time-consuming. Considerable amounts of time and resources must go into preparing and distributing the discussion paper, reviewing submissions and following up on public comments. Give people enough time to prepare their responses. Comment periods range from 60 to 90 days, although you will need to have the flexibility to extend this, depending on the circumstances and needs of the public.

At the very least, a follow-up document or series of other consultation activities such as open houses and public meetings will have to be considered to respond to input from the public. The discussion paper and call for submissions may also create very high expectations among people, particularly those who took the time and effort to submit their opinions.

6.

Toll-Free Telephone Line

What:

A toll-free telephone line is a highly specialized form of consultation involving the establishment of a direct telephone service to a Ministry office. Communication and information can flow both ways. You can leave a recorded message listing upcoming activities or providing other information relevant to an on-going problem or program. Similarly, callers can leave messages, either giving their opinions or leaving their name and telephone numbers so that Ministry staff can get back to them later.



A hot-line is one application of toll-free numbers that is very effective in emergency situations. Callers can inform the Ministry of an emergency and, in some cases, obtain immediate advice on how to respond to the emergency. Depending on the issue or objectives of the service, the hot-line may be open 24-hours a day, seven-days-a-week, and may require the presence of Ministry staff.

When:

A toll-free line can be a cost-effective means of keeping in touch with a large number of people on a relatively complex or long-term problem. It can be used to publicize upcoming activities related to your public consultation program. It can also help you receive people's opinions and concerns. Some remedial action plan teams use toll-free lines as part of their overall consultation program involving public meetings, open houses, newsletters and advisory committees.

A hot-line is an effective means of engaging public help in responding to environmental emergencies. The Ministry uses a hot line, for example, to allow people to notify it of spills and obtain immediate recommendations for action.

Special Considerations:

A toll-free line or hot-line will have limited applicability in most consultation programs. Both involve substantial cost and effort. For example, you will need to ensure that a hot-line is properly staffed by people who have the expertise to answer detailed questions. Moreover, Ministry staff answering the telephones will need to have excellent communication skills, which may require substantial training and support. No matter how you are using a toll-free line, you must ensure that you respond to all calls at once, either by telephone or letter.

7.

Targeted Briefing

What:

A targeted briefing is an event at which Ministry representatives make a presentation on a specific issue or initiative to a selected audience. The audience may consist of a particular community group, an individual firm, an industry association, or set of groups. The briefing could be arranged at the invitation of the Ministry or upon request from the group, and is not open to the general public.

The presentation is typically followed by detailed discussions in a question-and-answer format. Lasting from one to several hours, the targeted briefing may be held either in Ministry offices, at the audience's own offices or facilities, or on some "neutral" territory such as a hotel or conference facility.

When:

A targeted briefing is usually used when a specific community is more directly affected by a problem than the general population, and you want to inform its members first. The briefing provides you with an opportunity to interact directly with members of the particular group, and allows for detailed exploration of concerns, circumstances and implications unique to the group.



Special Considerations:

While a targeted briefing may identify ideas useful for building consensus on an issue, it cannot be used as a forum for making decisions because it is closed to the general public. For this reason, as well, some people may have the perception that the Ministry is acting “in secret” with a special interest group, rather than in the open with all interested persons. You may well have to inform the general public very soon after a targeted briefing.

There may be a problem with raising expectations of members of the targeted audience. You will need to state your purpose and timeframe clearly at the outset.

8.

Public Seminar

What:

A public seminar is a formal event designed to promote an exchange of information and ideas between Ministry staff and members of the public. While a seminar is similar to a workshop, there are important differences. Unlike a workshop which focuses on a specific task, a public seminar typically addresses broad policy themes and directions. The seminar incorporates a mixture of activities, such as formal presentations by invited speakers, plenary discussions and question-and-answer sessions with the full group, and “syndicate” workshops involving smaller sub-groups focusing on particular questions or topics in more detail. The event is open to the public, though participation is usually restricted to a manageable number to ensure that all participants can actively participate.

An important principle of a public seminar is that, unlike a public meeting, there is no “audience”. Everyone comes as an active participant. “Experts” or representatives of particular disciplines or interests may be specially invited to serve as “resource persons”. A seminar should be complemented by displays, such as poster sessions, and handout materials provided by Ministry staff and participants alike.



When:

A public seminar allows for highly detailed and focused discussion and exploration of important issues or topics. The combination of presentations, plenary discussions and syndicate workshops provides a rich mixture of information exchange, discussion and debate. A public seminar is not a decision-making forum; rather, it is designed to explore issues and develop ideas for consideration in other stages of consultation.

Special Considerations:

A public seminar is a complex activity, requiring elements of a public meeting, open house and workshop. Considerable logistics are involved in its organization and delivery. You will also need a number of people with excellent communication skills for chairing the seminar, making presentations and facilitating the syndicate workshops.

A seminar, like a public meeting, may be dominated by individuals or groups who divert the seminar from its primary purpose. You will need to reinforce at the outset that the seminar is not a public meeting, and that you need the active involvement of all participants.

9.

Site Visit

What:

There are two general kinds of site visits. One involves inviting members of the public to visit a particular physical site in order to obtain first-hand information and orientation to a site-specific project or problem. Typically, you would meet with invited participants and provide a verbal orientation to the site and a review of the situation in question.

In the second type of site visit, you visit with individuals or organizations at their own locale, such as a home, workplace or neighbourhood site. Such meetings may be organized quickly in the case of an environmental emergency.

In both forms of site visits, you may also provide handout materials with more detailed background data or information, or may make arrangements for follow-up briefings and consultation.



When:

A site visit allows for a direct and immediate exchange of information between you and the participants. If the visit is in the form of a tour to a physical site, the activity provides participants with a chance to “see” the problem for themselves in a personal and informal manner. A visit to people’s homes, communities or workplaces allows you to address the concerns of people who may be affected by rapidly emerging problems or opportunities. In either format, a site visit allows you to obtain first-hand a considerable amount of local knowledge into the problem or site.

A site visit is particularly effective when used in combination with other consultation activities. For example, a monitoring committee or public advisory committee could visit a site. Visits could precede or follow an open house or public meeting, so that people could have a more detailed orientation to a problem.

Special Considerations:

While a site visit will be helpful in certain circumstances, it is not generally effective for providing information to or hearing from a large number of people. It can provide ideas for a future consensus-building activity, but cannot itself be used to build consensus or make decisions. Either type of site visit will demand considerable planning, and will require you to have very good interpersonal communication skills, particularly if the proposed project is a controversial one.

10. Monitoring Committee

What:

A monitoring committee consists of a group of representatives from a particular community or region who assume a “watchdog” function. Members of the committee are typically nominated by appropriate agencies and groups within the community. The committee is recognized by the Ministry as the legitimate vehicle for coordinating and conveying community concerns. A monitoring committee exists until the problem for which it was organized is resolved.



PUBLIC CONSULTATION ACTIVITIES

While a public advisory or liaison committee is concerned primarily with developing solutions, a monitoring committee is focused more on the implementation phase, that is, on ensuring that the results of any decision are being acted upon in a suitable manner. Given that memberships among the two kinds of committees are similar in their representation of the community's interests, it is possible that a liaison committee could evolve into a monitoring committee, or that a monitoring committee for a specific problem could be expanded into a public advisory committee for a more complex and longer-term problem.

When:

A monitoring committee is a useful mechanism for gauging community-level reactions to the responses of the Ministry (or of others, such as an industry or company). It may be an appropriate activity to handle an emergency situation, such as the site clean-up of a chemical spill. More generally, you could use the committee on an on-going, routine basis to help build good community relations. For example, the committee could provide you with a regular point of contact, and serve as an informal source of public comments and evaluation. It could be an effective means of promoting increased awareness of environmental issues and of Ministry actions and perspectives throughout the community.

Similarly, it can help mobilize community support to complement the resources and actions of the Ministry in dealing with the issue at hand. It can serve as an early warning system for gauging potential community reaction to alternative approaches and strategies. It can also help keep the Ministry (and others) directly accountable to the needs, concerns and priorities of the community.

Special Considerations:

The establishment of a monitoring committee may create high expectations within the community. You will need to clarify your needs and the limits of the consultation process. You will also need to recognize the potential for conflict and confrontation in the activity. Remember, selection of committee members is not up to you. As a result, the committee may be dominated by individuals who are interested in seeking confrontation with either the Ministry or the people who caused the problem.

For more details, see the handbook, ESTABLISHING A SUCCESSFUL PUBLIC COMMITTEE.

11.

Focus Group Session

What:

A focus group session is a meeting of invited participants, designed to gauge the probable response of one or more groups to a proposed action or initiative. Participants are specifically selected to represent particular communities or regions, socio-economic or demographic groups, or particular stakeholder interests. Commissioned by a client and run by professional facilitators or “social marketing” consultants, a focus group lasts anywhere from two hours to a full day. Any individual session will have up to 20 participants. Though the emphasis is on qualitative research (obtaining knowledge and insights on potential public reactions and preferences) rather than quantitative research (statistical representativeness), several parallel focus group sessions can be held to test for consistency in a cross-section of locations or sub-groups.



Participants are presented with one or more “proposals” (which may range from a statement of a problem to potential solutions and strategies). Often alternative proposals are presented. Participants are asked to provide their reactions to the material and are questioned by the facilitators to find out more about the nature and intensity of their expressed views, and of any recommendations they would make.

When:

A focus group session is a highly specialized activity that you should consider when you need to gain a relatively detailed understanding of people’s concerns and values. It allows for a highly focused and in-depth analysis of reactions, values and perspectives of representative members of various groups. It is particularly useful when preliminary ideas have already been developed and you are seeking reactions and potential refinements. It will provide you with information and ideas to be used in other consultation activities, such as public meetings, workshops and advisory committees.

Special Considerations:

A focus group is not an effective activity for providing information to the general public; nor is it a forum for you to respond directly to questions, build consensus or make decisions. As well, you will almost certainly need outside expertise to run a successful session.

Informal Communication

Supporting and connecting all 11 formal consultation activities is a set of informal communication techniques. Informal communication allows you to talk with people in a direct and personal manner.

Common informal communication techniques include:

- routine telephone calls
- personal letters
- “coffee shop” discussions
- asking people to inform others (“word of mouth”)
- visiting people in their homes or places of work
- making sure people know you are available

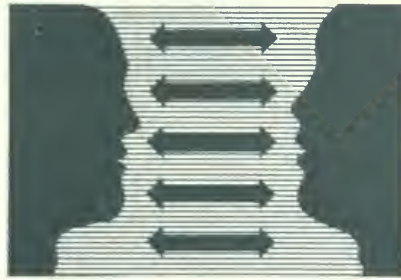


Informal communication lets you talk with people at a personal level not possible in any formal consultation activity. People often feel comfortable enough in such situations to tell you things they otherwise would not say or would feel uncomfortable saying in a large group. Informal communication is also an important outlet to keep information flowing between formal consultation events, and lets people know that you have not forgotten them.

Informal communication techniques can support your consultation program before, during and after specific consultation activities. For example, they can help you:

- identify individuals and groups who should be consulted, as well as how they should be notified or invited
- gather information and understand people’s viewpoints prior to formal consultation activities
- connect activities by providing or sharing follow-up information separate from any report you may send out
- directly involve and acknowledge the contributions of individuals
- establish and maintain good community relations

The challenge is to make informal communication a regular part of your consultation program, and a natural part of the way you relate to your public. For more ideas, see the Communications Branch’s publication, **ACHIEVING GOOD COMMUNITY RELATIONS** and talk with your Communications Branch Project Co-ordinator.



IV DEVELOPING YOUR PROGRAM

Your public consultation program will usually be made up of a series of consultation activities, supported and connected by a combination of public information tools and your own informal communication with people in the community.

This chapter provides ideas to help you develop your consultation program. It offers some guidelines for choosing specific activities to meet your different needs at different stages. Two examples of Environment Ontario's public consultation programs, for a remedial action plan and a control order, are summarized at the end of the chapter to show how various activities can be put together into an overall program.

There are three major steps in developing your consultation program:

- **Set a goal.** What do you need out of the consultation program?
- **Identify who is “the public”.** Who should or may want to be involved in your public consultation program? What is the most effective way to notify them of your program?
- **Develop a game plan.** Choose a series of appropriate consultation activities to meet the needs of the public and your program. Ask your Project Co-ordinator for help in addressing the communication components of your program

The ideas here are guidelines only. You will have to develop a consultation program to meet the special needs and circumstances of the issue. The number and types of activities you choose will depend on the goals of your program. While a program may use only one activity, a complete consultation program will typically involve several.

Remember:

- **Build your program around any statutory requirements.** Public consultation does not replace statutory requirements such as hearings, but it should be used to support them. For example, public meetings or open houses may be used to provide information and clarify issues in advance of a hearing.
- **Be flexible.** Have a vision of what your program might include, but be prepared to adapt it as you go along. Evaluate your plans regularly to ensure that the selected consultation activities are meeting your needs.
- **Consider and compare different combinations of activities.** Few activities can provide all things to all people, but they can be used to complement one another. Different activities will vary in their demands on your time, budget and other resources.
- **Check with your Project Co-ordinator in the Communications Branch.** Ask for advice and assistance. Use the branch's public information resources to help link your consultation activities.
- **Improve your consultation skills.** Take advantage of opportunities to improve your own skills by observing other public consultation activities. Make use of training courses

Set A Goal

Begin developing your public consultation program by asking yourself: What is needed out of the process? What decisions can be influenced? What are the opportunities for people to influence these decisions? Remember, if there are no decisions to be influenced, then you are not carrying out public consultation, but rather public information or education.

The object or results of your consultation program can vary greatly. What you need from the program will determine the opportunities people have to influence decisions, as well as the kinds of activities you choose. For example, typical results of Environment Ontario's consultation programs include:

- a revised set of conditions on a certificate of approval or on a control order, where the scope for public influence may be relatively narrow

DEVELOPING YOUR PROGRAM

- a plan, as in the remedial action plan program, where people have substantial scope for influencing the final decision
- new or amended Ministry environmental policies, procedures, regulations and legislation

Who Is “The Public”?

Without denying an opportunity to any interested individual or groups, you first need to determine those who must be consulted. Particular individuals, communities, groups and interests will obviously be affected by the proposed project more than others.

As a starting point in identifying “the public”, ask:

- Who will be directly affected by the operation of the project?
For example, who might experience noise and pollution?
Who might see things such as a new structure or plume?
- Who will be indirectly affected? Will a particular community, for example, enjoy more job opportunities or need to consider the impacts of increased traffic?
- Are there other groups who may have an interest in the project?
Local environmental groups, industry associations and municipal councils may want to participate. If the proposed project has regional or provincial implications, then groups with more general mandates should be identified.

Proper notification will be an important factor in the success of your program. Develop and review a preliminary list of participants. Decide which individuals, groups, or communities require special notification of the consultation program.

Here are some ways to notify people:

- Advertise in the local media to inform the general public.
- Meet and talk informally with those likely to be involved or affected. Ask their advice about who you should contact and how best to notify them.
- Put a leaflet or brochure in every mailbox in a neighbourhood and post a notice on the site of the proposed project.
- Mail a notice or open letter to all interest groups and community organizations on your list of participants.
- Send personal letters to those who require more targeted communication or who you want to contact personally.

For more ideas, see the Communications Branch’s publication, **ACHIEVING GOOD COMMUNITY RELATIONS**.

Develop A Game Plan

Recognize that your needs within the consultation program will shift in emphasis from time to time. These needs can be grouped under five major categories:

- 1. PROVIDING INFORMATION**
- 2. UNDERSTANDING THE PUBLIC**
- 3. DISCUSSING THE ISSUES**
- 4. BUILDING CONSENSUS**
- 5. ENSURING FOLLOW-UP**

While it may seem that more than one activity can meet a particular need, keep in mind that these are broad categories. Your choice of activities will vary depending on your specific needs and circumstances. Throughout the overall program, you will need to consider the strengths and limitations of each activity.

For example, you may recognize that you need a better understanding of people's concerns before proceeding with your proposal. Both an open house and a focus group session can help you, but the kind of insight into people's views will be significantly different with the two activities. For an understanding of the strengths and limitations of each activity, refer to the overview provided in the previous chapter, and use the series of detailed handbooks on the major activities used by Environment Ontario.

This section provides some suggestions and guidelines to help you choose the most effective combination of activities to meet your specific public consultation needs. At the end of the section, a summary chart highlights those activities that are generally best suited to achieving each of the five categories of consultation needs. Again, these are ideas for your consideration. The final choice will be yours.

1. PROVIDING INFORMATION

People must have information in order to participate effectively in public consultation. You must provide information regarding the subject of the consultations, as well as your proposed consultation approach. People should understand the issues, the decisions that are to be made, and the ways in which they can contribute to the process. Adequate information concerning scientific and technical matters, facts, research methods and findings, and alternative courses of action should also be provided.



DEVELOPING YOUR PROGRAM

All consultation activities have an information sharing component. Some emphasize it more or are more effective in certain circumstances.

- *Public meetings* provide you with an excellent way to convey information to a large group. Everyone at the meeting has the opportunity to hear and discuss the same information, making it possible to begin the process of building consensus. You have the chance to respond to questions directly and immediately, clarifying points and clearing up any misunderstandings which might arise.
- *Open houses* allow you to present more detailed information than at a public meeting. They are an excellent means of showing design or construction plans, the geographical location of specific sites, and alternative proposals.
- *Public discussion papers* are a good way for you to present facts, issues, and proposed solutions in a formal written document, representing an official position of the Ministry.
- *Toll-free lines* can be used to provide highly specific information. Hot-lines are best for emergency situations.
- *Targeted briefings* allow you to present information first to a group with a special interest in a matter, or to those who are most directly affected.
- *Site visits* allow you to provide people with a direct and personal orientation to the physical site of an environmental problem or proposed project.



2. UNDERSTANDING THE PUBLIC

You cannot discuss issues effectively with people until you have a good understanding of their concerns, ideas and values.



DEVELOPING YOUR PROGRAM

- *Public meetings* help you hear individual and community concerns, and learn about the relationships between people with different concerns. People with different views interact with one another, and respond to one another's comments.
- *Open houses* offer you a chance to hear people who put forth their views individually, either by speaking with hosting staff, or in writing on a comment sheet.
- *Workshops* can allow you to understand how people respond to a common task or problem-solving challenge.
- *Public advisory committees* allow you to become familiar with a wide range of public views within a problem-solving format.
- *Public discussion papers* with a call for submissions will yield thoughtful written opinions from people who often are the most interested in the subject.
- *Toll-free lines* allow you to hear from a relatively large and widely dispersed population.
- *Targeted briefings* allow you to become aware of the concerns of a selected audience with a special interest in the problem or proposed project.
- *Public seminars* allow you to hear people's views both in responding to presentations and in syndicate workshops.
- *Site visits* allow people to provide you with considerable local knowledge about a site.
- *Monitoring committees* may keep the Ministry up to date on community views regarding the progress of a project.
- *Focus groups* provide you with an in-depth understanding of the views and values of a representative group or community and, in particular, with an understanding of how people might respond to a specific idea or option. Unlike other consultation activities, a focus group provides an understanding of the concerns of those people who may not attend a public meeting or open house.

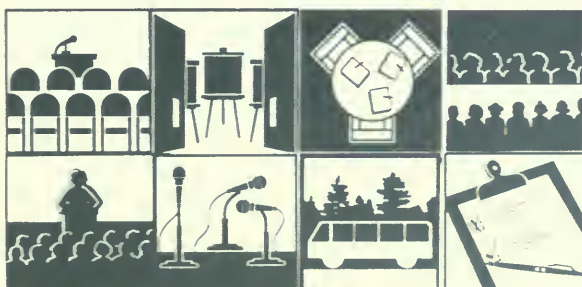


3. DISCUSSING THE ISSUES

In most public consultation processes, it will be important to meet people face to face to discuss issues. This allows you to speak spontaneously to proposals and respond to questions immediately and directly. A direct meeting also demonstrates the willingness of the Ministry to be publicly accountable for the success of the public consultation program.



- *Public meetings* can encourage a group discussion between Ministry staff and a relatively large number of participants.
- *Open houses* let you discuss issues and ideas one on one or in a small group.
- *Workshops* enable people to discuss and debate their views while focusing on a specific task or problem-solving exercise.
- *Public advisory and public liaison committees* enable committee members representing different constituencies to discuss problems and solutions in detail over an extended period of time.
- *Targeted briefings* allow you to respond directly and immediately to questions from a community or group with a special interest in a problem.
- *Public seminars* provide the opportunity for participants to react to presentations and discuss their concerns directly with Ministry staff.
- *Site visits* allow you to discuss issues in an informal and direct manner.
- *Monitoring committees* allow for detailed discussion over the progress of specific projects.



DEVELOPING YOUR PROGRAM

4. BUILDING CONSENSUS

When you need a consensus for action among participants, activities that encourage problem-solving and consensus-building among individuals and groups will be required.



- *Workshops* give you an excellent opportunity to bring together people with different views to find a common ground on a specific task.
- *Public advisory and public liaison committees* may also form the basis for consensus-building, as all committee members are chosen to represent a range of perspectives in order to develop solutions to a common task.



5. ENSURING FOLLOW-UP

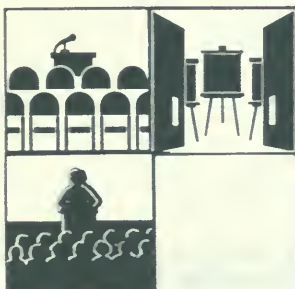
Follow-up is an essential component of each consultation activity. You must keep people informed of the next steps in the consultation program and provide information on any new developments. At the conclusion of the program, you will need to inform all participants of any final decision regarding the issue or project. You must demonstrate that you listened to people. You must show how you have incorporated their comments into the decision or explain why their views are not reflected.



DEVELOPING YOUR PROGRAM

Several activities are suited to these requirements. Public information tools, such as news releases, direct mailings and newsletters, and informal personal contacts, such as telephone calls, are particularly important follow-up activities. They can help connect two formal consultation activities and help in communicating information on next steps and decisions. For advice and support in using public information tools, contact your Project Co-ordinator in the Communications Branch. Also refer to the publication, **ACHIEVING GOOD COMMUNITY RELATIONS**.

- *Public meetings* can convey results and decisions to a large number of people.
- *Open houses* can provide follow-up information in a format suitable for individual review.
- *Public advisory committees* and *monitoring committees* can act as vehicles for disseminating information on a decision throughout the community.
- *Targeted briefings* can convey follow-up information and decisions to a group or community with a special interest in the result, prior to making the information more widely available.



The following chart summarizes those activities that are generally suited to achieving each of the five categories of consultation needs that may arise in your consultation program.

DEVELOPING YOUR PROGRAM

Chart: MATCHING ACTIVITIES TO NEEDS

		PROVIDING INFORMATION	UNDERSTANDING THE PUBLIC	DISCUSSING THE ISSUES	BUILDING CONSENSUS	ENSURING FOLLOW-UP
1. PUBLIC MEETING		●	●	●		●
2. OPEN HOUSE		●	●	●		●
3. WORKSHOP			●	●	●	
4. PUBLIC ADVISORY/ LIAISON COMMITTEE			●	●	●	●
5. DISCUSSION PAPER/ CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS		●	●			
6. TOLL-FREE NUMBER		●	●			
7. TARGETED BRIEFING		●	●	●		●
8. PUBLIC SEMINAR			●	●		
9. SITE VISIT		●	●	●		
10. MONITORING COMMITTEE			●	●		●
11. FOCUS GROUP			●			
INFORMAL COMMUNICATION		●	●	●	●	●

Further Considerations

Once you have begun to develop a public consultation program and have selected particular activities, a number of factors remain to be considered. Contact your Project Co-ordinator in the Communications Branch to inquire about the following matters:

- advertising (Communications Branch places all paid ads)
- production of displays
- production of handouts
- Ministry publications
- translation needs (oral or written)



What resources do you have available?

Public consultation takes time, effort and thought. Be sure to consider what access you have to resources within the Ministry, and think carefully about your budget. Make sure you have accounted for any costs associated with the following factors:

- meeting room or hall, including possible rental fee
- audio-visual equipment
- transportation (such as the availability of a Ministry vehicle)
- refreshments
- staff time and expertise
- travel expenses

How large is your audience?

Your consultation activities should be sensitive to audience size. Try to estimate how many people will be interested in participating, and plan your activity accordingly. If you have no idea how big your audience will be, make your activity as flexible as possible to accommodate people. If you are required by statute to hold a certain kind of activity, such as a public meeting, make sure you rent a room or hall large enough to accommodate all those persons who may have an interest in the issue.

How will your audience respond?

It is also important for your meetings to be held at a time convenient for your audience. For example, it would be difficult to convince farmers to attend a daylong workshop in the fall. Pay close attention to the season, time, and place of your activity in order to attract a large number of participants. Most importantly, become aware of how people in the particular community prefer to receive information, and plan your event accordingly.

How much time do you have to prepare?

Some activities take more time and effort to organize than others. Time-consuming items include the preparation of original materials, such as displays, workshop handouts or other audio-visual aids. Logistical arrangements such as advertising, room bookings and travel also take time. If your activity is going to be a success, it is essential to give participants adequate notice about the event. You will need to give at least two weeks to local media as well as to the public when organizing any event.

Contact the Communications Branch about advertising at least four weeks ahead of your scheduled activity. Advertisements usually run at least two weeks in advance of any event.

Putting these ideas to work:

Two Environment Ontario case studies

The ideas presented in this chapter are already at work in a range of public consultation programs developed by the Ministry. This section highlights two such programs, noting how different consultation activities are being used to meet particular needs and circumstances:

- ***ST. MARYS RIVER REMEDIAL ACTION PLAN***
- ***CONTROL ORDER under the Environmental Protection Act***

The two case studies provide a contrast in styles. The first is a long-term, community-based program involving a complex mix of consultation activities. The second is a short-term program with specific consultation activities required by statute.

CASE STUDY #1: ST. MARYS RIVER REMEDIAL ACTION PLAN

Introduction:

The International Joint Commission has identified 42 'areas of concern' around the Great Lakes where remedial action is needed. A remedial action plan (RAP), is to be designed for each 'area of concern'. In each area, a joint federal-provincial technical RAP team is appointed. In the case of the St. Marys River RAP, the team consists of 12 members from Canada and the United States. The RAP team works with the public in writing a remedial action plan and oversees a public consultation program. A binational public advisory council (BPAC), representing a range of interests, works closely with the team.

The program is just getting underway. Here is a chronology of the major activities from the fall of 1987 to early 1989:

Fall 1987: Contact List

The first step in the public consultation program was to inform people about the RAP and the role of the public. A contact list was developed using attendance lists from a variety of public events. All RAP team members were asked to submit names of contacts, and these people, in turn, were asked to name others who they thought would be interested in the RAP program.

September 1987: Toll-Free Line

A toll-free RAP line was established so that people could inquire about the RAP program, and have an access point to express their views. The toll-free line allows people to leave a message with an answering service. Their calls are promptly returned.

December 1987: Letter of Introduction

A letter of introduction was sent to all of the people on the contact list. It explained the purpose of the RAP, and informed them that public information sessions were being planned.

January 1988: Notification

A flyer was sent out to all the people on the contact list indicating where and when the public information sessions would be held. A public involvement



co-ordinator, who had been hired to assist the RAP team, made 80 telephone calls to remind people about the sessions.

January-February 1988: Preparations

Advertising for the public information sessions began two weeks before the sessions. Newspaper advertisements were placed in Wednesday and Saturday issues for two weeks, as well as on the day before the session. The ads were placed in English- and French-language daily and weekly papers. A media package that included a public service announcement and a news release was circulated to 15 radio and television stations.

February 1988: The Sessions

A public information session was held on each side of the St. Marys River. At the sessions, a binational public advisory council (BPAC) was proposed. Questionnaires were distributed to gather comments about the public involvement program and people's concerns about the water quality in the river. People were also invited to suggest alternative forms of consultation. Results of the questionnaires showed that people were in favour of a BPAC. The RAP team accepted the recommendation. An evaluation form was also distributed so people could comment on the meeting itself.

February 1988: Report

A follow-up report on the February meeting was sent to all of the people who had completed questionnaires or evaluation sheets.

March-April 1988: Display Booth

A display booth was set up at a Sportsman's show in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, and at a home show in Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan. The RAP team distributed handouts and had a sign-up sheet for the mailing list. The emphasis of the display was on getting information out to the public and on gaining support for the RAP program.

May 1988: Follow-up Letter

An follow-up letter was sent to all people on the contact list. The letter described the RAP team's activities, outlined the role of the BPAC and announced an upcoming public meeting.

DEVELOPING YOUR PROGRAM

June 1988: Public Meeting

At a public meeting, a detailed technical presentation was made on point sources of pollution. The presentation included a video focusing on the problems in the St. Marys River, and the need for a remedial action plan. (The video has been made available to other groups for educational purposes.) Formal nominations for BPAC membership were called for and accepted. Questionnaires and evaluation sheets were also distributed at this meeting.

June 1988: Call for Nominations

As a follow-up to the public meeting, the call for BPAC membership nominations was sent to people on the contact list.

September - October 1988: Establishing the BPAC

A 37-member BPAC, representing interested groups in Canada and the United States, was established. Some people were named as 'alternates' and can fill in for members unable to attend a meeting.

October 1988: Announcement of Membership

Local newspapers were sent the BPAC membership list as well as information on the council's first meeting.

November 1988: First BPAC Meeting

The first BPAC meeting clarified administrative and procedural matters. It was decided that BPAC meetings will be held every 4 to 8 weeks, alternating between Canada and the United States. General public meetings will be held every 4 to 6 months. Public meetings will ensure that the BPAC and RAP team regularly consult the general public.

Following every BPAC meeting, minutes and the agenda for the next meeting are distributed.

January 1989: Newsletter

The RAP program's first newsletter was issued. The newsletter will keep people informed about the progress of the work of the RAP team and BPAC, and will profile key issues and reports.

CASE STUDY #2: CONTROL ORDER

Introduction

A control order is usually used to rectify pollution problems that are complex and cannot be solved by operational changes alone. It is usually designed to deal with a broad range of environmental problems, such as the discharge of toxic chemicals, and is intended to address all 'media' (such as air, surface water and groundwater). In developing a control order for a major industry, there is frequently a two-stage public consultation process, with an open house and a public meeting.



Consider a small town in northern Ontario, where the main industry is a pulp mill. Environment Ontario is concerned about the environmental impacts of the mill, and decides to issue a control order. In developing the control order, three major parties will be involved: Ministry regional staff, the pulp and paper company, and the public.

Provincial Officer's Report:

Discussions with the company

As a statutory requirement, Ministry staff prepare a Provincial Officer's Report. The report documents and provides an analysis of environmental problems that need to be addressed. Using the report, Ministry staff begin discussing alternative solutions with the company, and the timing for their implementation. If additional studies are required to identify the cause of a problem, these studies may become a requirement of the control order.

Providing information to the public

The Provincial Officer's Report is made available to the public and is sent to the municipality.

Discussion with other interested groups and individuals

While dealing with the company, Ministry staff also seek out other interested groups, such as the local municipality, other provincial government agencies and the Medical Officer of Health. At this point, there is no direct contact between the company and these groups. Ministry staff may raise community concerns with the company.

Advertising the Open House and Public Meeting

The open house and public meeting are advertised together. The public meeting is usually held within a week of the open house, and at the same location. The open house is held twice in the same day (afternoon and evening). The Ministry places English- and French-language advertisements in local and area newspapers, and contacts radio stations.

Making information available

In advance of or at the open house, the Ministry provides information packages to the media, municipalities and other interest parties. The packages are also available at central locations such as public libraries, and include a draft control order developed on the basis of discussions between the Ministry and the Company. Detailed background documents are also available.

The Open House: providing information

The open house is a joint venture between the Ministry and the company. At the open house, people are provided with the information that has been gathered concerning the environmental problems, the remedial measures planned and the anticipated environmental benefits. Drawings and aerial photographs are displayed showing the location of the existing industrial complex, proposed facilities and other technical features.

Formal presentations are not usually made at the open house. Instead, the activity emphasizes one-on-one discussion. Ministry staff will attend the open house, and talk to the draft control order as a first cut at addressing the problems. The draft order represents a possible set of solutions, but may still be changed based on additional public consultation.

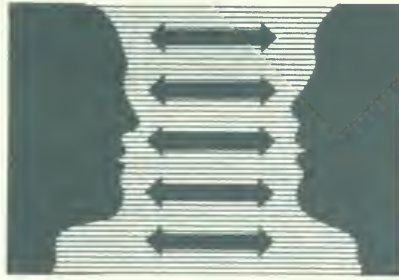
The Public Meeting: understanding concerns

The Ministry holds a public meeting to hear people's comments and concerns about the draft control order. The meeting is often chaired by a local person who is respected in the community, and is known to be independent of the major interests represented at the meeting. (Prior to the meeting, Ministry staff will brief the chairperson on the issues.) The chairperson must ensure procedural fairness at the meeting.

The meeting begins with a statement by the Ministry's regional director. The statement is followed by a more detailed presentation by Ministry staff on the nature of the problems and the alternative solutions. On behalf of the company, consultants discuss the specifics of the solutions proposed in the draft control order. After these presentations, the floor will be open for questions and for people to provide their suggestions.

Follow-up

People usually have 15 working days following the public meeting to submit written comments. The draft order is revised on the basis of these comments. At the end of this period, the director issues a Notice of Intention to serve the order, after which the company has, by statute, 15 days to object. When the control order is served, a news release is issued. The news release addresses any changes in the control order made as a result of public consultations. Copies of the control order and news release are sent to everyone who submitted written comments.



V BUILDING COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Developing your public consultation program is the first step. Implementing your program requires good communication skills. This chapter provides some suggestions for improving your communication skills.

Effective communication takes commitment, but help is available, and your efforts will be rewarded.

There are four general kinds of communication skills that are key to good public consultation:

- 1. Making an Oral Presentation**
- 2. Chairing a Meeting**
- 3. Answering Questions**
- 4. Dealing with People**

1. Making an Oral Presentation

Be prepared. Organize your material. Practice your speech. Concentrate on skills that will improve your delivery.



Organization

- Organize your material carefully and logically. Provide cues throughout your speech to remind the audience of the sequence you are following. For example:

“Today I want to explain the three major challenges to establishing an effective recycling program. These are: . . .

“From my discussion of this first challenge, you will conclude that a great deal of co-operation is required to meet it. Let’s move on to discuss the second challenge.”

- Be aware of your time constraints, and do not try to cover too much material. Be realistic about what your audience can absorb.

- Do not overwhelm your audience with a lot of numbers or statistics. Use statistics sparingly, and keep in mind the point you are making is more important than the numbers themselves. Compare:

“33,451 people in the community, or 66.9% are in favour of the project.”

and

“Two-thirds of community members are in favour of the project.”

- Put your notes on small index cards, and turn them over as you cover each point. This will enable you to glance quickly at your next point, without having to search for your place on a page.

Practice

- Time your speech and cut it down if it is too long.
- Practise your speech in front of people who are not familiar with the topic; they will be a good judge of how easy your presentation is to understand.
- Practise your speech until it becomes familiar. The more familiar you are with it, the more relaxed you will be when you address your audience.
- Practise your speech using any visual aids or equipment you intend to use at the presentation. Even the simplest equipment may cause you problems when you are trying to concentrate on your delivery. For example, if you decide to use an overhead projector, practise putting the transparencies on the projector as you speak. Tab your overheads so you know which way to put them on the screen.
- If you are going to point out specific things on the overhead, do not point to them on the slide itself. The image of your hand will be magnified on the screen, and any movement of your hand will be distracting to the audience. Instead, approach the screen and use a pointer. This will enable the audience to pay attention to you and the information on the screen.

Delivery

- The best speech is one given extemporaneously. That is, do not read from a script, but use brief notes. This will enable you to interact with your audience, and give a more interesting presentation.
- Speak clearly and slowly.
- Make eye contact with your audience.
- Project your voice, and make sure everyone can hear you.

- Speak about your topic with interest and enthusiasm (if you look bored, then your audience will wonder why they should care).
- Be as expressive as possible, without appearing phoney or unnatural.
- Try not to use acronyms. If you must, explain what they stand for so everyone understands them.
- Avoid technical terminology. If you must use a technical term, define it clearly.
- Avoid jargon.
- As you speak, try and note how your audience is reacting. Good observation and active listening will help you respond more effectively to the audience's concerns.

"I see some people shaking their heads. Let me to go over that point again."

- Use overheads sparingly, and only if you are comfortable with them. Consider using conventional slides, instead.
- Consider preparing handouts that summarize or complement your presentation, whether or not you are using overheads. You may want to distribute the handouts before your presentation if the material is detailed and you want people to follow along closely, or after so that people will not be reading them as you speak.

2 Chairing a Meeting

In preparing to chair a meeting, make sure you have the following materials and information:

- Statement of the purpose of the meeting
- Proposed agenda
- Proposed rules of order
- List of the names of speakers and others you will be introducing

At the meeting, remember that your role is to oversee the procedural operation of the meeting. As chairperson you should remain impartial, and facilitate the exchange of ideas and debate by maintaining order and fairness.



BUILDING COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Here are some tips:

- Welcome participants as they arrive. Be sure to identify yourself and wear a name tag.
- Start the meeting on time or explain delays.
"It is eight o'clock, but we will wait just a few minutes longer as some people will have been delayed by the snowstorm."
- Introduce yourself first, and explain your role as chairperson.
- Explain the "house rules" (for example, that no smoking is permitted in the meeting room; where and when people may help themselves to coffee, the location of washrooms, and when they can expect to break for any meals).
- Explain the purpose of the meeting.
- Introduce speakers, Ministry staff and special guests.
- Table the agenda.
- For small groups it may be helpful to have a short discussion regarding the agenda (though this is not advisable in a large group).
- If someone introduces a topic clearly beyond the scope of the agenda, politely recognize the validity of the concern, but point out that it is not the purpose of the meeting to address such a topic. If appropriate, invite them to speak with you after the meeting. On the other hand, if the question is simple and short, answer it.
- If discussion is good, but seems to be moving away from the agenda, check with the audience to see if they want to pursue the discussion in process, or move back to the original agenda.
"This is an excellent discussion, but we have moved away from our central task. Shall we move back to the main topic, or would you like to spend a few more minutes on this discussion?"
- Use good judgment in enforcing rules.
- If angry participants persist in interrupting or changing the topic, let them get the issue on the table, but if they carry on for a long time, check back with your audience to see if people want to continue the discussion.
- Help participants to clarify their statements. Try to convey that it is you having difficulty understanding, not them having difficulty explaining.
"If I understand you correctly. . ."
or
"If I am not mistaken, you are saying . . . am I correct?"

- Re-state all decisions made at the meeting to ensure that everyone is clear on them and agrees to the wording.
- If time runs out and there are still a lot of questions, indicate what opportunities people will have to pursue their concerns.
“It is getting very late, and I am afraid we must end this part of the meeting. I realize there are still some questions. If you would like to stay awhile after the meeting, we would be pleased to answer them.”
- In closing the meeting, thank people for attending and participating. Indicate that their comments and suggestions have been valuable. Inform them of the next steps or activities planned for the public consultation process.

3 Answering Questions

There is an art to responding to questions. Here are some helpful suggestions:

- Try to anticipate questions and have staff available who are qualified to answer.
- Have someone keep track of the order in which people raise their hands with a question.
“I believe you had your hand up first. Then you at the back will be next, and then the person here on the right. Thank you.”
- After you have heard and understood the question, repeat it clearly so that everyone in the room can hear it. (People who do not hear or understand the question may become disinterested and begin to chat among themselves.)
- If you do not understand the question, ask the questioner to clarify it.
“I am not sure I understand your question. Could you repeat it, please?”
- If the question is irrelevant or off-topic, there are several ways you might handle it. If the question requires a short answer, then respond to it and quickly move on to the next question. If the question requires a detailed answer, then ask if you can respond to it after the meeting. If the person persists, then explain that while this is not the right forum to deal with it, you will respond if the audience has no objection.



- If you are not sure of the answer to a question, say so. People will respect your honesty.

"I am sorry, but I don't know the answer. We will make a note of your question and get back to you. Please give us your name and telephone number later, so that we can call you. Thank you."

4. Dealing with People

Before, during, and after public consultation activities, you will be speaking directly with people, in either a group setting, such as at a public meeting, or on a one-to-one basis, as in an open house or during a break in a public meeting. Here are some guidelines on key interpersonal communication skills useful in such situations:



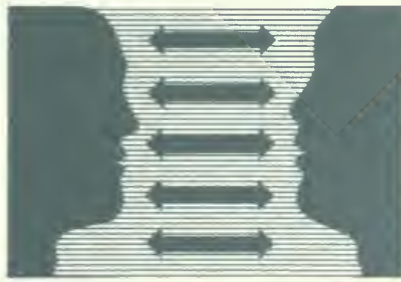
- Listen carefully to questions and comments.
- Answer any questions.

Avoid:

Q. How long will that landfill liner last?

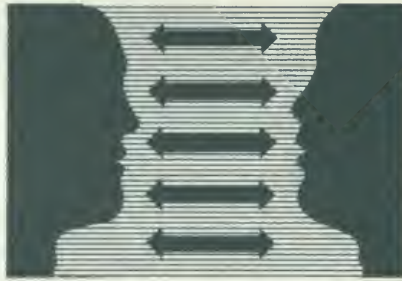
A. This landfill liner is made of . . . These are used throughout the province and their performance has been entirely satisfactory.

- Be perceptive. If the person appears to know very little about the project, or if they admit outright that they are confused, take the time to explain what you are talking about.
- Alternatively, if the person appears well-informed, and asks a specific question, do not burden them with basic information.
- Recognize and accept that there are other points of view.
Be receptive to new ideas and comments.
- Do not focus on opinions, focus on issues, problems, and alternatives; remember that you are representing the Ministry.
- Do not be judgmental or take sides in an argument.
"What we're seeing here is an example of how difficult this issue is."
- If people want to blow off steam, let them. If you listen carefully, and sympathetically, without being defensive, people will usually calm down.



VI MAKING IT WORK: 10 PRINCIPLES

1. **Take the initiative.** Public consultation is a permanent part of the Ministry's decision-making process. Anticipate the need for consultation. Make use of informal channels of communication.
2. **Be flexible.** Be willing to adjust the public consultation program to meet unforeseen developments. Listen and respond to the needs, concerns and suggestions of others.
3. **Communicate clearly.** Make sure the purposes and the consultation processes are clearly understood by all participants. Throughout the program, check frequently to ensure these are kept in mind.
4. **Set clear limits.** Clarify the objectives and scope of your consultation process at the beginning. All participants should understand which issues are open for discussion and where there is opportunity to influence decisions.
5. **Show respect.** Consultation should be carried out objectively, openly and responsibly. Remember that people are experts on their own values and community situation, and many have specialized knowledge and skills applicable to environmental issues.
6. **Make the most of your limited resources.** Public consultation requires careful thought, planning and preparation, but time and resources are always limited. Be aware of your constraints and make the most of the resources you have.
7. **Emphasize consensus-building.** Recognize that conflict, tensions and anxiety over environmental issues are inevitable. Focus on understanding the sources of conflict. Neither deny nor ignore conflict, but seek to overcome it to arrive at a consensus.
8. **Take responsibility.** Whether or not you hire outside expertise, you are responsible for running the program. Take advantage of opportunities to improve your consultation and communications skills. Help is available.
9. **Evaluate your performance.** Make evaluation a major element of your consultation program. Check with participants to see if their needs are being met. Remember that self-evaluation is an important part of any program.
10. **Always follow up.** Follow-up is a critical component of the program. Following up on questions, fulfilling commitments to provide more information, and informing the public of the Ministry's decisions are all important.



VII WHERE TO FIND HELP

Developing and implementing a good public consultation program demand ideas, skills and resources. The Ministry's Communications Branch can help you with all three. Throughout this Guide, there are many references to checking with your Project Co-ordinator in the Communications Branch. Your co-ordinator will work closely with you to determine your needs and communications budget, and will recommend the best approaches to take. Then your co-ordinator will put you in touch with people who can meet your needs and will supervise the Communications Branch's involvement in helping you implement your consultation program.

To summarize, here are the major areas where your Project Co-ordinator can help:

- Developing a program and selecting activities
- Advertising
- Organizing events and exhibits
- Preparing brochures, posters and other written material
- Producing or locating videos and other audio-visual material
- Writing speeches and news releases
- Media relations
- Training on media relations and public consultation
- Locating outside sources of assistance (such as in other ministries and public interest groups)

WHERE TO FIND HELP

Here are the names and numbers of staff in the Communications Branch who can help you:

Project Co-ordinators:

- For:**
- air resources
 - investigation and enforcement
 - SAC
 - Lab
 - hazardous contaminants
 - environmental assessment
 - farm program
 - West Central Region
 - Northeastern Region
 - Northwestern Region

Call: *JOHN STEELE 323-4337*

- For:**
- project engineering
 - environmental approvals and land use planning
 - water resources
 - intergovernmental relations and strategic projects
 - Central Region
 - Southeastern Region
 - Southwestern Region

Call: *GINNY WHITTEN-DAY 323-4348*

For: Waste Management

Call: *MORRIS ILYNIAK 323-4650*

For: Acid rain

Call: *GERRY MERCHANT 323-4333*

For: MISA

Call: *FRANK GIORNO 323-4648*

Manager, Public Information and Consultation:
DAVID EVANS 323-4571

Environment Ontario's Public Information Centre:
(for Ministry publications and catalogue):
Main Floor, 135 St. Clair Ave. W.,
Toronto, Ontario M4V 1P5 (416) 323-4321

Training

Training to improve your public consultation management and communication skills is available with both the Ministry and the Ontario government.

The Ministry's **Corporate Training Program** and the Ontario government's **Human Resources Secretariat** both offer a wide range of management, communications and other training courses. Here is a sample of the courses available.

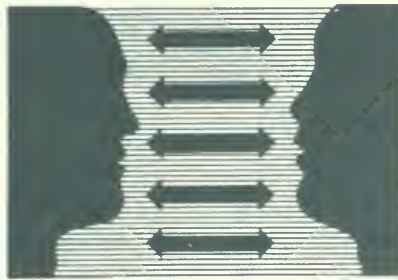
The **Corporate Training Program** includes courses such as:

- "Dealing with the Public"
- "Meetings for Results"
- "Communication Skills Workshop"
- "Speak for Success"
- "Writing Skills for Technical Staff"

The **Human Resources Secretariat** offers such training as:

- "Effective Briefings and Presentations"
- "Team Leadership and Organizational Effectiveness"
- "Think on Your Feet"
- "Management Skills"
- "Consulting Skills Workshop"
- "Meetings for Results"
- "Communication/Interpersonal Skills"
- "Assertive Communication"
- "Written Communication Programs"
- "Writing Essentials for Managers"
- "Presentation Skills"

For more information on these training programs, contact the Ministry's **Human Resources Branch**.



VIII THE CHECKLIST

This chapter provides a checklist summarizing the major steps relevant to most public consultation activities. The **RESOURCE KIT** includes a pad of checklists to use in your public consultation program.

There are three major groups of tasks in the checklist:

1. PREPARATION
2. IMPLEMENTATION
3. FOLLOW-UP

1. PREPARATION		2. IMPLEMENTATION	
Planning ☐ Set objectives ☐ Define needs ☐ Determine objectives ☐ Select resources ☐ Select activities ☐ Establish roles ☐ Assign staff	Production ☐ Prepare report form ☐ Prepare checklist form ☐ Prepare checklist form	Setting up ☐ Post signs ☐ Set up sign-in table ☐ Set up display ☐ Arrange chairs, floor mats ☐ Set up audio-visual equipment ☐ Place audio playback facility ☐ Place audio playback table ☐ Set up refreshments	Registration ☐ Register participants ☐ Prepare sign-in table ☐ Prepare sign-in table
Agents ☐ Prepare materials ☐ Prepare materials ☐ Prepare materials ☐ Prepare materials ☐ Prepare materials ☐ Prepare materials ☐ Prepare materials ☐ Prepare materials	Audio-Visuals ☐ Prepare materials ☐ Prepare materials ☐ Prepare materials ☐ Prepare materials ☐ Prepare materials ☐ Prepare materials ☐ Prepare materials ☐ Prepare materials	The Event ☐ Lead through a tour ☐ Lead through a tour ☐ Lead through a tour ☐ Lead through a tour ☐ Lead through a tour ☐ Lead through a tour ☐ Lead through a tour ☐ Lead through a tour	Follow-up ☐ Prepare materials ☐ Prepare materials ☐ Prepare materials ☐ Prepare materials ☐ Prepare materials ☐ Prepare materials ☐ Prepare materials ☐ Prepare materials
Advertising ☐ Prepare materials ☐ Prepare materials ☐ Prepare materials ☐ Prepare materials ☐ Prepare materials ☐ Prepare materials ☐ Prepare materials ☐ Prepare materials	Logistics ☐ Prepare materials ☐ Prepare materials ☐ Prepare materials ☐ Prepare materials ☐ Prepare materials ☐ Prepare materials ☐ Prepare materials ☐ Prepare materials	Follow-up ☐ Prepare materials ☐ Prepare materials ☐ Prepare materials ☐ Prepare materials ☐ Prepare materials ☐ Prepare materials ☐ Prepare materials ☐ Prepare materials	Follow-up ☐ Prepare materials ☐ Prepare materials ☐ Prepare materials ☐ Prepare materials ☐ Prepare materials ☐ Prepare materials ☐ Prepare materials ☐ Prepare materials

CHECKLIST

1. PREPARATION

Planning

- ☐ Set objectives
- ☐ Assess needs
- ☐ Determine information needs
- ☐ Review resources
- ☐ Select activities
- ☐ Establish team
- ☐ Assign tasks
- ☐ _____

Evaluation

- ☐ Prepare sign-in book
- ☐ Prepare comment sheets
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Agenda

- ☐ Appoint chairperson
- ☐ Designate speakers
- ☐ Engage resource persons
- ☐ Assign other tasks
- ☐ Formulate presentations
- ☐ Check registration needs
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Audio-Visuals

- ☐ Prepare handouts
- ☐ Produce displays with Communications Branch
- ☐ Prepare overheads/slides
- ☐ Obtain video/film
- ☐ Book appropriate projector(s)
- ☐ Obtain microphone/speakers
- ☐ _____

Advertising

- ☐ Contact Communications Branch
- ☐ Prepare: Invitations
- ☐ Posters
- ☐ Newspaper ads
- ☐ Notices
- ☐ Public Service Announcements
- ☐ Nametags
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Logistics

- ☐ Book room and consider:
 - Room size
 - Physical Access
 - Lighting
 - Electrical outlets
 - Security
- ☐ Inspect and pre-test facilities/equipment
- ☐ Prepare seating arrangement/head table
- ☐ Plan refreshments
- ☐ Ensure transportation
- ☐ _____

CHECKLIST

2. IMPLEMENTATION

Setting up

- ☐ Post signs
- ☐ Set up sign-in table
- ☐ Set up displays
- ☐ Arrange chairs/head table
- ☐ Set up audio-visual equipment
- ☐ Have extra projector bulbs
- ☐ Have spare extension cords
- ☐ Set up refreshments
- ☐ _____

Registration

- ☐ Register participants
- ☐ Provide sign-up for mailing list
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

The Event

- ☐ Greet people at door
- ☐ Start on time or explain delays
- ☐ Check if everyone can hear and see
- ☐ Provide introductions
- ☐ Review scope and objectives of meeting
- ☐ Identify next steps
- ☐ Record comments and commitments
- ☐ _____

3. FOLLOW-UP

- ☐ Hold de-briefing
- ☐ Review comment sheets
- ☐ Identify lessons learned
- ☐ Assign follow-up tasks
- ☐ Prepare/add to mailing list
- ☐ Review public consultation program
- ☐ _____



IX A FINAL WORD

Have You Conducted a Good Public Consultation Program?

Planning and carrying out a public consultation program can be a challenging and rewarding task, taking many months and involving many activities. How do you know if your public consultation program has been a good one?

Do not judge the program's success on whether:

- It was easy or difficult.
- It lasted a short time or a long time.
- It was inexpensive or expensive.
- There was no controversy or a great deal of controversy.
- There were few activities or many activities.
- Few people participated or many people participated.

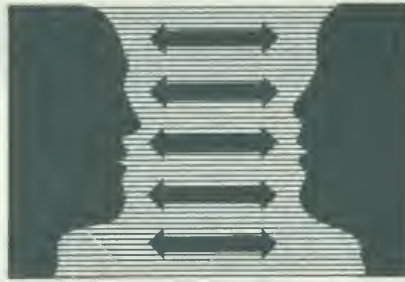
Instead, ask yourself:

- Did your program inform and provide access to anyone who might want to be consulted, as well as those you needed to consult?
- Did you use activities that allowed people to be consulted in a way that met their needs?
- Did the people you needed to consult participate?
- Did the final decision or recommendations take into account what people said?
- Did you inform people of the final decision?
- Did people understand the final decision?

If you can answer "yes" to these questions, then your public consultation program was a good one.

Remember:

1. The Ministry is committed to full, open and active public consultation on its programs and policies.
2. There is a wide range of consultation activities available. Develop your consultation program by choosing the appropriate activity to match your audience, issue, consultation objectives, and stage of development of the issue. Use public information tools and informal contacts to link specific activities.
3. The Communications Branch will assist you in preparing your program, by providing advice, support materials, training and resource people.
4. Your commitment and positive attitude will make for a good public consultation program.
5. An investment of time and effort in a good public consultation program will result in better decisions, and more efficient and effective program implementation.



NOTES

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